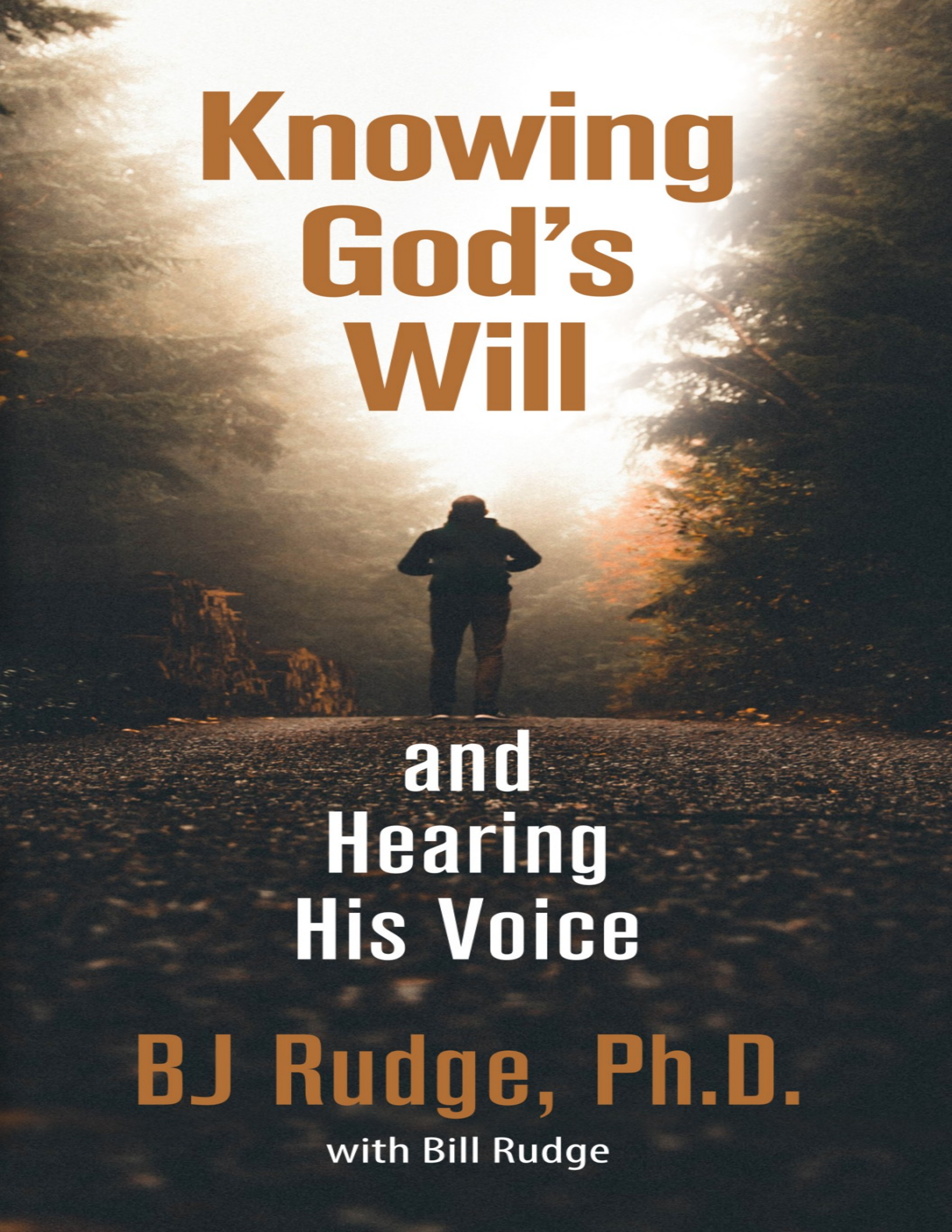
Knowing
God's
Will
and
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His Voice
BJ Rudge, Ph.D.
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Hermitage, Pennsylvania

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We Can Know God's Will

One of the questions that most of us will ask at some point is, "What is God's will for my life?" In fact, for many of us this will be an ongoing journey. The quest to find an answer to this question normally arises when a major life decision has to be made.

I was asked by several high school seniors to share with them how to know God's will. Their obvious motivation to meet with me was to help them figure out what they should do with their lives once they graduated. Numerous choices, such as whether they should go to college, what college they should attend, or what their major should be, completely overwhelmed them. They felt ill-equipped to discern and know God's will in the face of the uncertainties of their future.

So, can we really know what God's will is for our lives? The answer to this is a resounding "yes," and the following are some biblical principles to help you live your life in the center of His will.

A Correct View of God

In Exodus 3, Moses sees a theophany[1] as God appears to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. God directly revealed to Moses the plan He had for him to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. I think many of us, as we try to discern God's will, wish that we could have a burning bush experience just like Moses; however, we all know that this is not the typical way God reveals Himself. As we go through the following principles, we will find that, just as God directly revealed His will to Moses, He has provided us with direct revelation of His will for our lives in His Word. Before we look at what the Bible reveals to us about His will, let's first make sure we have a correct view of God. In fact, this is the exact place where Moses began to know what God's will was for his life (Exodus 3:12-16).

God as a Distant Being

Many get lost in discerning God's will because they first have a misconception of WHO God is. For instance, some see God as a distant being who is not concerned with our problems. Therefore, we are left to try to use our reason and experience alone to guide us through life. Certainly, the incarnation of Jesus Christ discounts this perception of God. As Matthew records in his gospel, "So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:22-23 NKJV).

God as a Vending Machine or a Personal Genie

Some people's view of God goes to the other extreme where they see God as being there only to make us happy. They see God as some celestial vending machine or cosmic genie who is simply there

at our beck and call to give us whatever we want. The Apostle Paul's life is clearly a contradiction to this type of theology. Instead of seeing God as being there to serve him, he recognized that he was to serve God, even at the cost of his own life (Philippians 1:21; 3:7-10).

God Is Sovereign

In contrast to the above views, the Bible reveals God as being sovereign over the entire universe. This not only includes the major events throughout human history, but even the smallest details of our lives. While God does provide us with the ability to make choices, we need to remember it is His will that is sovereign, not ours. The following scriptures speak to this proper view of God:

> The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice (Psalm 97:1).
>
> The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19 NKJV).
>
> Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Isaiah 46:9-10).
>
> Are not two sparrows sold for a cent [*assarion*, the smallest copper coin, worth about 1/16 of a laborer's daily wage]? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

These verses are a great reminder that our lives are not dictated by chance or luck. Instead, God works all things together in accordance to His sovereign will (Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11).

A Correct View of God's Will

The Bible is very clear that following God's will is essential for every believer. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus connects doing the will of the Father with entrance into the kingdom of heaven: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). Certainly, Jesus was not advocating that salvation is a result of our works. However, He does indicate that a person who is truly saved is one who does the will of the Father. The Greek present tense used in this passage emphasizes this is an ongoing action. In other words, a person who has true faith in Jesus Christ will live in continual obedience to the will of God as the normal path for his life. True faith always produces the fruit of good works (James 2:26).

The Apostle John also emphasizes the importance of following God's will in his first epistle. He wrote this epistle so his readers would know they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). One of the indicators John gives to his readers of knowing they have eternal life was whether they followed the will of God: "The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever." As these passages highlight, obedience to God's will is not only an identification of a true believer, it also confirms for a person whether he will live with God for eternity.[2]

Since we see that God's will is important, we now need to establish a correct understanding of His will. As Paul admonished the Ephesians, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). Fortunately, God's Word provides us with direction in finding this out. The following are examples of some of the verses that give us specific information about the will of God as it relates to our lives.[3]

Most important to God is our salvation leading to our eternal life with Him. Therefore, Jesus, according to the will of the Father, gave Himself for our sins (Galatians 1:4). God's will is also for our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). In other words, God desires us to live a life of holiness. God's will is for us to live a life of sacrifice

(Romans 12:1-2). This means we are to live under His control and serve Him. God's will is for us to be Spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:17-18). This is a call to live under the influence of the Holy Spirit. God's will is for us to live a life of submission (1 Peter 2:13-17). In other words, we are called to respect those in authority. God's will is for us to live a life of satisfaction (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). This means we are to rejoice always, pray consistently, and have a continual attitude of thankfulness.

As we see, we do not have to be ignorant of God's will for our lives. Instead, through His revealed Word, we can have understanding about His will. Thus, as we make *specific* decisions related to our lives, we can be guided by the above revealed aspects of His will.

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1. A theophany refers to an appearance of God to a human.
2. John also states we can have confidence that God hears our prayers when we pray according to His will (1 John 5:14).
3. For additional insights, please refer to John MacArthur's book, *Found: God's Will*.

Avoid Six Paths

Now that we have established a proper understanding of who God is and what His will is, our next task is to determine HOW we are to apply this to our lives. Before we look at specific steps we can take in applying His will to our lives, let us first lay out six paths that we must avoid. I have found in my own life that when I have walked down any of these six paths they always divert me from putting my life at the center of God's will.

Blind Faith

The first path we must avoid is blind faith. Blind faith is when we take no initiative or action regarding a decision we need to make. I have met numerous people who live this way. For instance, a good friend of mine had this type of faith when he was looking for a job after graduating from college. Like many other people, he thought that once he got his degree he would not have much of a problem finding a job. However, after a few months of not finding a job in his field, he became frustrated. Added to this, he hated his current job and felt like he had wasted his time in school since he was not using his degree.

He finally came to the point where he stopped looking for jobs and sending out his resume. I asked him why he did this and he said, "I am just going to trust that God will open the right door at the right time. Since He is sovereign, there is no point in trying to force God's will." While we have already established the fact that God is sovereign, does this necessarily entail the type of faith demonstrated by my friend?

From studying Scripture, I find nowhere in the Bible where God tells us to have a blind faith that is characterized by inaction. In fact, the Bible speaks against those who just sit back and watch life pass them by. In Proverbs, depending on your translation, these people are referred to as lazy or sluggards, "the way of the lazy [sluggard]

is as a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19; see also Proverbs 6:6-11; 22:13; 26:13-16). While I do not believe my friend is lazy, I do believe he was justifying his inaction by adhering to a blind faith and a misunderstanding of God's sovereignty.

I reminded him of Abraham, who recognized that a proper faith in God is demonstrated through action. He understood that for his descendants to inherit the land of Canaan (Promised Land), he had to first leave the country of his family in Ur. I challenged my friend that after time in prayer, if he felt God was calling him to leave his current job, he should start taking steps to look for another. Sure enough, after several weeks of sending out resumes and making contacts, he not only found a job, but he found one in his field.

I wonder today if my friend would still be at his old job if he had decided not to take any action and just kept going along in life with a blind faith. Unfortunately, I know a lot of people who are still seeking God's will with a blind faith, and because of inaction are still living in Ur and missing out on Canaan (Promised Land).

Consider how the writer of Hebrews defines true faith, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV). Here we see that faith is not based upon empirical evidence (what we can see with our eyes) but is grounded in an inner confidence and trust in God. It is this trust that moves us forward into action, despite the uncertainty of what is before us.

Living by Circumstances

A second path to avoid is living by circumstances alone. People who live by circumstances alone often find themselves making rash and hasty decisions. Consider Esau in the Old Testament who, because he was hungry, decided to sell his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34). The birthright, which was given to Esau as the firstborn, entitled him to "authority over the family in place of the father, (a double share of the inheritance, Deuteronomy 21:17), and the right to the priesthood."[4] However, because of the

circumstances in which he found himself, Esau rashly gave up all of this for a bowl of stew.

In trying to discern God's will, living by circumstances alone and making rash decisions will always lead you astray. A friend experienced this reality. A situation arose at his workplace which prompted him to move his entire family back to their hometown. Because of the circumstances of this situation, he hastily packed up his belongings and in the middle of the night drove his family back to their home which was over a 12-hour drive. Then, when he got back to his hometown and had his family settled, the situation at his workplace changed, and he began to second guess his decision to move. The rashness of his choice to move had created unnecessary tension in his family and so much overwhelming stress on this man that he had to seek medical attention. Fortunately, after a few months, his personal health and family issues were resolved. Yet, because he lived by circumstances, he still left emotional scars with his family that will take even longer to heal.

We need to remember Peter who walked out on the water to meet Jesus. As soon as he took his eyes off Jesus and focused them on the waves crashing around him, he began to sink (Matthew 14:22-33). As we seek God's will for our lives let us also keep our eyes on Jesus and not the circumstances around us so we, too, can avoid sinking.

Trusting in Yourself Alone

Trusting in yourself alone is another path to avoid. I know many people who trust in their emotions alone when they make a decision. If something "feels" good, then it must be the right decision. However, we all know how our feelings change like the weather. For instance, I cannot tell you how many people have come into my office because of marriage problems and say, "When we first met, I had such strong feelings for her/him and now I just do not feel that way anymore."

While emotions do play a powerful role in our lives (see Galatians 5:22-23 for emotions that should be cultivated in our life), they fluctuate constantly based upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves. As we have just seen, living by circumstances alone is never a way to discern God's will for our lives.

Other people look to their reason alone when they make a decision. If something sounds "reasonable" and "logical" then it must be a great decision. Certainly, like emotions, reason does play a role in our lives. For example, I can use my rational faculties to know that when a bad storm with thunder and lightning is coming it is more reasonable to be in a safe shelter than outside. However, just like emotions, human reason is limited and corrupted by the Fall (Jeremiah 17:9; Psalm 94:11), and therefore, I can never trust it alone when discerning God's will. Beyond this, the Bible gives us numerous warnings for those who live their lives by trusting in themselves alone.

> There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death (Proverbs 16:25).

> He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but he who walks wisely will be delivered (Proverbs 28:26).

Two of my friends are living examples of these biblical warnings. Both have attempted to base their lives on the philosophy that they can look within to find all the answers to life. God, in their minds, is just a spiritual crutch weak people need to lean on to get them through life. While on the outside they appear to have it all together, on the inside their lives are falling apart.

One friend continues to try and find meaning climbing the corporate ladder, only to realize that once he gets to the next rung, he is still left empty (Matthew 16:26). After a heart-to-heart talk with my other friend, he actually opened up and said he never thought at the age of 35 his life would end up with so much disappointment. This is a tragic reality when we choose to live our lives trusting in ourselves alone instead of God.

While it is true that reason and emotions play a role in our Christian walk, they should never be the final determiner in making decisions. Instead, if we are to live our lives at the center of God's will, we must ultimately look to Him and His Word. As the following Proverb reminds us: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Self-Expectations

Self-expectations are a fourth path that will divert us from following God's will. When I was in high school, my greatest desire was to play soccer. I would spend hours on my own in my backyard just working on my skills. Soccer became more than an obsession—it literally became an idol in my life. I had the attitude that I was willing to live for God and follow His plan for my life, if His plan included my desire to play professional soccer.

Through a variety of circumstances that occurred in my life, which I will discuss later, I came to realize that following God's will does not come with us dictating to God what we expect from Him. Instead, it is yielding our desire and will over to Him and walking in faith and trust in Him. We need to stop seeing God as being there only to make us happy and to give us what we want. Rather, we need to see Him as He truly is—the sovereign ruler over everything. He is not subject to us; instead, we are subject to Him. Therefore, we should stop seeking our own personal desires and seek to honor and glorify Him with our lives. Beyond the fact that He deserves our praise and honor, His will and purposes will always be accomplished whether we choose to yield to them or not. "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand" (Proverbs 19:21).

Setting Limits on God

A fifth path to avoid is setting limits on God. Typically, the issue here is not that we believe that *God in and of Himself is limited* in what He can accomplish. Rather, it has more to do with the fact that we look to our own inadequacies and shortcomings as *limiting what we believe God can do in and through us*.

I am sure all of us at one point in our lives have been guilty of suffering from the "Moses syndrome." We all know about Moses. He was one of the greatest leaders in the Bible, called to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Surely this great leader, listed among the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:23-29), would never have seen himself as inadequate to carry out God's calling in his life. However, if we go back to the early chapters of Exodus, we find Moses doubting his own ability to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians. He not only saw himself as someone of little significance (Exodus 3:11), but also lacking the ability to carry out his calling (Exodus 4:10).

Moses was indeed right. Yet, despite his own weakness and lacking, God used Moses to deliver His chosen people and display His glory to the nations. Like Moses, recognizing our limitations before God is not a sin. However, it is wrong when we allow these limitations to prevent us from doing God's will. This is why we need to look beyond ourselves and our circumstances and realize that we serve a God who is able to do what we consider to be impossible.

Let's stop setting limits on God and realize that even His thoughts and ways are far beyond our comprehension, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Living a Life of Worry

A final path to avoid in discerning God's will is living a life of worry. Worry is merely a lack of trust in God that He is in control of our

lives, not only in the present but also in the future. I know a woman whose life is defined by worry. Every time you see her, she is negative and pessimistic. She reminds me of Eeyore who was the donkey in the Winnie the Pooh stories. Eeyore always anticipated the worst, and, of course, it always came. While our minds do not control reality, they certainly impact the way we perceive reality. When we worry and constantly have negative thoughts, then just like Eeyore, we will end up being victims of our own negative perceptions. Jesus continually taught on the dangers of worry. Let us heed His advice so that we, too, do not become Eeyores:

> Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:31-34).

> For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life's span? If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you? You men of little faith! And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things.

But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you (Luke 12:22-31).

Certainly, in life we will face obstacles and challenges and times of uncertainty. However, as we face them and seek direction from God amid them, we do not have to be dominated by worry. The antidote Paul gave the believers at Philippi in dealing with worry is still effective for us today. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

We have examined certain paths we must avoid if we are to put our lives at the center of God's will. Now we need to look at the positive steps we can take, which will give us confidence in knowing that we are living our lives in the center of God's will.

4. Irvine Robertson, "Firstborn," in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, eds. Charles F. Pfeiffer and others (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 609.

Seeking Direction

A friend of mine called to ask for some advice and prayer. He had recently gone into a business venture with another friend. After a few months, the partner left him with the business and a large mortgage payment. He put the property on the market but was unsuccessful in finding someone to buy it at a price that would not put him into debt.

Eventually, two potential opportunities came along, but he said he did not know what to do. The financial constraints with the property were having an impact upon his personal health. In addition, it began to impact the dynamics of his family as well as his other personal business. Although this man had faith in Jesus Christ, he had hit a crisis in his life where he was emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually overwhelmed. While he wanted to honor God during this crisis, he said he lacked any peace and joy in knowing what God wanted him to do. He said his greatest fear was not that God would be unfaithful, or that God was unable to help him, but that he would make a decision that was contrary to God's will.

As I spoke with my friend, I told him before he made any decision he needed to spend the next three days in prayer, fasting, and examining some principles, outlined below, that have helped me in following God's will. I told him these principles would enable him to have a better understanding and peace in discerning God's will in his current situation. I told him that while he may not know when and how God would resolve his problem, he could still have the peace and confidence to walk in faith and trust.

My friend was willing to take me up on this three-day challenge. Beyond the verses we already talked about in regards to God's will, I told him these principles were all designed to bring him to a point in his life where he was living a Christ-centered life rather than a self-centered life. I assured him that when he came to this point, he

could have the confidence to know the Holy Spirit would guide and direct his decisions.

After three days in prayer, fasting and examining the following principles, it was amazing to hear the change in my friend's voice. He went from a person who was worried, had no direction, and appeared defeated, to a person who spoke with confidence and peace in knowing God was going to guide his steps in this matter. While he is still in the process of making a final decision on this property, God has already proven to be faithful. Besides the fact that my friend needed to find a means to help cover the financial obligations with the property, he also had a desire to see the property be used for some type of ministry outreach. Through God bringing two men into his life, both of these have presently been met.

Even though the circumstances may change down the road, my friend has learned a valuable lesson through this ordeal. Not only can he now face future challenges with a better understanding in discerning God's will, but he has also provided his family with a great example of how God wants them to seek Him in all things.

The following comment he sent to me by e-mail confirms this reality: "I thought I was following God's will because the end result of the decisions I was making looked good for me, because after all doesn't God want to bless me? What better way for Him to bless me than for me to first follow His will. I now realize that following His will does not mean a happy ending. And following His will may be the only part I play in Him receiving the glory."

Just as these principles helped provide direction for my friend, and for my own life, I know they will also have great value for you as you seek to live your life in the center of God's will.

Prayer

The first principle of centering our lives in God's will is prayer. Jesus Christ is the greatest example of how we should live a life of prayer. He not only taught His disciples how to pray (see Luke 11:1-

4), He also modeled for them how to live a life of prayer. Jesus recognized, even as the Son of God, how important it was to separate Himself from others and spend time with the Father (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; John 17). He specifically taught His disciples how to be persistent in prayer and to approach the Father with their requests:

> Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or what person is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf of bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? So if you, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7-11).

In this passage, we see Jesus teaching His disciples that when they have a request they should take it before the Father. What better first step in discerning God's will in a situation than to commit it to prayer? In fact, one of the benefits of prayer is godly wisdom, the very thing that we need when we are making a decision. Consider the words of James, who emphasizes that, when we lack wisdom, we should approach God in prayer:

> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (James 1:5-8).

Not only does prayer give us wisdom, it also produces within us a deeper trust and faith in God—the very thing James said we should have when we come before God with our desire for wisdom.

I remember when I had to take my then six-year-old daughter, Anneka, to the hospital because she kept complaining of pain in her throat. As we were driving to the hospital, Anneka was very nervous and scared. She kept asking me what they were going to do to her and whether she had to get a shot. I did my best to try and calm her down by telling her she did not need to worry and that everything was going to be alright.

When we pulled into the parking lot of the hospital and got out of the car, Anneka grabbed my hand and gave me a piece of paper. Unknown to me, she had written a note while we were driving to the hospital. As I looked at the note, it said the following, "I love you daddy." With tears in my eyes, I looked back at her and told her that I loved her, too. Even though Anneka did not know what was going to happen to her at the hospital, and even though she was scared, she knew she could trust me as her father. This is why, despite being afraid, she was willing to get out of the car. Other than my wife, she would not have gotten out of that car for anyone else. Her trust in me did not just spontaneously come into existence as we drove to the hospital that day. Instead, it developed through the time she had spent with me. By knowing me as her father, Anneka knew I loved her and that I would never hurt her.

The note Anneka gave to me was her way of telling me that even in the face of uncertainty and fear, she could trust me. In the same way, this is the relationship God desires to have with us. As we face the uncertainties and challenges of life, He wants us to know we can always trust Him as our heavenly Father. Of course, just as with my daughter, Anneka, trust in a person does not just spontaneously happen. Therefore, seek each day to spend time with God and to know Him personally. Then, like Anneka, when you face the uncertainties of life you can have the confidence to know God is walking right beside you.

David, who was considered a man after God's own heart, recognized he had to seek God in prayer to know God's will for his life, "Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:10).

Fasting

Fasting is another great spiritual discipline all of us should implement in our lives. It not only brings about great spiritual benefit and wisdom in situations, but it also has health benefits. For me, fasting is a way to spend extra time with the Lord by removing unnecessary distractions.

Fasting can be prompted by a specific situation. For example, someone may have to make a major life decision and he/she wants to separate special time to seek God about that decision. The book of Esther is a great example of this type of fast. Fasting can also be a regular part of a person's Christian life. I know many people who fast once a week just to renew and refresh themselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. At the ministry where I work, the staff spends a special time in prayer and fasting in January. We do this to commit the upcoming year to the Lord and to line up our will with His as we set our goals for that year.

It is important to keep in mind that fasting is not a way to manipulate God to do what we want. Instead, it is a way to conform our will to His. Also, there are many ways to do a fast. Some people prefer to fast from food, while others choose to *fast* from television, the internet, or something else that occupies their time. The issue is not *what* you fast from, but *why* you fast. The why for me is to humble myself before God and seek His will, and not my own, in all areas of my life. This understanding of fasting is also confirmed by Scripture. David said, "I humbled my soul with fasting" (Psalm 35:13). Ezra said, "I proclaimed a fast … that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions" (Ezra 8:21). Jesus began His ministry after a time of fasting (Matthew 4:2), and the Apostle Paul was commissioned to take the Gospel across the Roman Empire after a time of fasting (Acts 13:2-3). In our lives, we should follow their example and allow fasting to be a way to commit our lives to His will.

My father's book, *Fasting for Sensitivity and Power*, is a great resource on how fasting can benefit our lives. His life and ministry

have been built on prayer and fasting, and as he testifies in the conclusion of this book, "Fasting (along with earnest prayer and Bible study) is one of the best ways to discover God's will and live a victorious life of obedience. Through it are gained sensitivity and discernment. God has used them to transform my life, guide and direct me, and bring ultimate victory out of some apparently hopeless situations."[5]

Seek Wise Counsel

There is a great proverb in the Bible that says the following, "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22). When I was a high school soccer coach, I applied this proverb to my program. Initially, I sought out other people who had the same vision and principles that I had to assist me. I did this because I realized that to make my program successful, I needed the support of other people. Throughout my years as a coach, I leaned heavily upon my assistants for advice and support. I am grateful God surrounded me with people I could look to for guidance as I made decisions. Together we were able to build one of the most successful high school girls' soccer programs in our region.

Our spiritual walk is no different. We are not called as believers to walk in isolation from everyone else. Instead, in the words of the Apostle Paul, we are one body with different parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). All of us need the encouragement and edification of other believers. We all need to have at least one person in our lives who loves us enough to encourage us when we are feeling discouraged, to rebuke us when we are living in opposition to the standards of God's Word, and to give us godly wisdom as we make decisions.

I am fortunate that in my life I have had a godly father to look up to. Even now, as a father of six, I still look to my father for wisdom as I make decisions. So too, each of us needs to have spiritual role models in our lives whom we can go to for godly wisdom. We should seek out men and women whose lives have been defined by a

consistent walk with God—people, like the Apostle Paul, who are an example of what it means to walk in the Lord's will (1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1; Philippians 3:17).

Let us pray that not only will God raise up a Paul in our lives, but also that we can be a Paul in the life of someone else. As Paul declared to the believers at Philippi, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

Be Open, Submissive, and Willing

I mentioned earlier that my desire was to be a professional soccer player. Certainly, there was nothing wrong with aspiring to such a lofty goal. The problem was that I allowed my desire to play soccer to be more important than my desire to serve and honor God. Soccer had become my identity, and my value was based upon it. In essence, I was living a self-centered life, rather than a Christ-centered life. My pursuit of my own dreams virtually destroyed me, and it took three injuries, which required surgery on my left ankle and both of my knees, to bring me to a point in my life where I began to seek God's will and not my own.

After my third operation, I wrote the following in my prayer journal, "God, I give my life and desires to you. Take this and build within me a desire to serve You, stronger than my desire to play soccer." You can read my book, *Faith Through the Fire*, which details what God taught me through these injuries and how He eventually brought soccer back into my life. For our purposes here, the main point to recognize, which I learned through my injuries, is that the first step in living and being used by God is to humble yourself before Him. In fact, pride (the opposite of humility), will always be a roadblock to trying to live your life at the center of God's will.

We must remember that when God chooses to use a person, He does not do it based solely on the person's ability. In fact, God is more concerned with the person's inner ability, and availability, than his external ability: "But I will look to this one, at one who is humble

and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). Samuel learned this when he was called to anoint one of Jesse's sons. He thought God would surely have him anoint Eliab because of his impressive physical stature. However, God told Samuel to look beyond the physical appearance, and reminded him that, "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Being humble before God is the main quality God seeks in using a person. A humble person is motivated out of selfless gain. In all they do, they seek to point people to God rather than to themselves. They understand they are utterly dependent upon the Lord and would rather die than disobey His will. Until we humble ourselves before God, we will find ourselves swimming against the current as we seek to know God's will for our lives. We must have the attitude of Christ, who willingly submitted His will to the Father (John 6:38; Matthew 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). When we do this, then, like Jesus, we can know that we are living in the center of the Father's will:

> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Trust God: He is in Control

We have already talked about the dangers of trusting in ourselves alone. In contrast to this way of living, we need to live a life where

we completely place our trust in a sovereign God. As believers, our lives are not dictated by luck or chance. Instead, we should see everything in our lives as being divinely directed. This means that everything in our lives has a purpose.

Sometimes, the purpose is to redirect our lives and to help us learn valuable life lessons, such as what happened with my soccer injuries. Other times, we might be in a situation which has the intended purpose of bringing glory to God. In some cases, the purpose may not be immediately clear, and it may take time to have it revealed but this does not mean God is not working in and through every situation in which we find ourselves. While we do have the freedom to make our own choices, and to face the consequences of bad decisions, our lives are still under the control of a sovereign God.

David knew what it was to walk through life facing many challenges. Here are some of the Psalms he wrote which are a great reminder that, even in times of uncertainty and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, we should always place our trust in God.

> And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You (Psalm 9:10).
>
> Some boast [trust] in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God. (Psalm 20:7).
>
> The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart exults, and with my song I shall thank Him (Psalm 28:7).
>
> Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts before Him; God is a refuge for us (Psalm 62:8).
>
> Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul (Psalm 143:8).

Read Numbers 13 and notice the danger that comes when we do not trust in God. Specifically, evaluate the contrasting responses the spies had to the land that God had promised them. While the spies acknowledged that the land truly flowed with milk and honey as God had told them, they also reported the land was inhabited by people of great strength and cities with strong defenses. Because of what they found, ten of the spies spread a discouraging report among the children of Israel doubting they could conquer the land God had promised. In contrast, two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, knew that, despite the challenges before them, they could trust God and be victorious.

As a result of the lack of trust in God, not only did the ten spies miss out on the Promised Land, but so did the rest of the children of Israel who were influenced by them. Only Joshua and Caleb, of all those who were twenty years and older, would eventually enter the land God had promised them (Numbers 14:29-30). No matter what we are facing in our lives, may we also have the same faith and trust in God that Joshua and Caleb had.

Patience

We live in a culture that seeks instant gratification. We hate to wait in line at the grocery store, to wait more than five minutes for our food at a restaurant, and we expect instant results from our exercise program. No wonder advertisements that promise us to lose 10 pounds in just a week or to become rich overnight seem to be plastered all over magazines, newspapers, and television commercials. Simply said, we are, by nature, impatient people. Unfortunately, we also bring this impatience into our relationship with God. We go to Him with our prayers and expect to have an instant response. We feel *He* should work on *our* time schedule rather than *us* working on *His* time schedule.

A few years ago, my wife and I decided after time in prayer to sell our house. While we liked the house we lived in, we simply did not have enough room for the three kids we had at the time. One of my

family members heard I was contemplating selling my house, and he approached me to see if I would be interested in buying his house. Besides being able to get a fair price on the house, his house was perfect for our family. It was located on a dead-end street with woods in the backyard, and the neighborhood had lots of kids that were around the same age as my children. This sounded like a great opportunity for my family. My family member already had a house he wanted to buy, so now the only apparent thing holding us back from buying his house was selling our house. At this time, houses were not only selling below their value, but they were also not selling very fast. There were many very nice homes which had been on the market for a few years.

Despite the apparent challenges before us, my wife and I were in agreement that God was leading us to put our house on the market. The realtor scheduled an open house a week after it was on the market, and a lady came whose parents lived two houses down from us. After walking through the house, she took my realtor to her parents, and they put an offer on our home. My wife and I were both excited and shocked to have an offer this quickly. We then went back to my family member to tell him the news, but he was no longer interested in buying that other house. Now, we found ourselves selling our house with no house to buy. After getting an extension to stay in our current home from the people who bought it, we spent the next several weeks going to open houses, scheduling appointments to see homes, and browsing the internet for potential homes. Throughout this process, I spent many hours in prayer. While I had faith God was going to work it all out, I began to become a little impatient.

As we approached the deadline for the extension given by the people who bought our home, our realtor told us to consider looking for houses to rent. I certainly did not want to take my family through the transition of renting and an additional moving process; however, we were coming to a point where we would have no choice. Our realtor told us if we did not find a house by the weekend of July 4th, we would never have enough time to get out of our current house and into a new one, so renting was becoming the only option.

Over the July 4th weekend, we went to see a house. My family member's realtor happened to be showing this house. She seemed surprised to see us as we told her we were still looking for a house. After we went to see this home, we also made arrangements to visit a house that we could potentially rent. As the weekend came to an end, I remember writing the following in my prayer journal, "Lord, I have to admit I am frustrated. I know You are in control of this situation, but it is so hard to see an end to this journey. I truly do not want to rent, but if this is Your will, please give my family the strength to endure this. Also, help me to be patient. Until You bring the victory, continue to provide me with Your peace. May my faith in You provide comfort and encouragement to my family."

On the final day that my realtor told us we had to get a house, my family member called me and told me he had put an offer on a house and if we still wanted, we could buy his house. When he realized our dilemma, he decided to buy the house he initially wanted.

After time in prayer, my wife and I decided to buy his house. Certainly, it was not the way we had intended, but in the end, I began to see why God allowed the process of selling our house to unfold the way it did. Besides the valuable spiritual lessons that my wife and I learned, it provided opportunities to let us minister to others who were facing difficult situations, as well as to allow the glory and faithfulness of God to be displayed.

In the process of finding a new home, impatience was a barrier for me in seeking God's will. However, as I earnestly sought the Lord's will, I began to recognize that following His will means we have to wait upon Him. In other words, we must yield to His time schedule and not make Him yield to ours. When I came to this point, I finally realized I was walking in His will and not my own. The following is another entry I wrote in my prayer journal as we were waiting to find a house to buy. "Lord, You are Sovereign and in control of this situation. You know the time constraints that are upon us. May I trust You in the details and may I wait patiently upon You."

No matter what you are facing, remember to be patient and wait upon the Lord. May the words of David in the following Psalm speak

to your heart as you seek to live your life in the center of God's will:

> I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD. How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done, and Your thoughts toward us; there is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, they would be too numerous to count. I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart (Psalm 40:1-5, 8).

Reflect Upon God's Faithfulness

A friend of mine called and wanted to talk to me about some of the major decisions she and her family were facing. She really wanted to follow God's will amidst her current situation but felt completely overwhelmed and was looking for some wisdom as to what to do. Her situation started several months before we talked. Her husband had a job transfer which, despite paying more money, required him to travel almost two hours to work every day. This, of course, meant he was not at home as much and had less time to be with her and their kids. So, to help make the situation better, they decided to put their house on the market and move closer to where he worked.

However, after several months with the house not selling, she began to question whether or not they should move. Added to this, recent tests that she had undergone seemed to indicate her cancer had returned. Even though she had been a Christian for a while, the challenges before her began to wear her down. As we spoke, I not only shared with her some of the principles we talked about earlier, but I also told her she needed to reflect upon how God had been faithful in her past. I shared my own experience of trying to sell our

house and how, when we were faced with numerous challenges, I gained strength from remembering I serve a God who has been, and still is, faithful.

The children of Israel in the Old Testament are a great example of why we should reflect upon God's faithfulness in the past. Whenever they faced a challenge, they were reminded to go back and reflect on what God had done for them. The purpose of this was to get the children of Israel to place their focus upon God who had proven in the past to be greater than any challenge they presently faced (see Deuteronomy 5:15, 7:18, 15:15; Joshua 4:19-24, 24:6-13). In fact, this is the reason why the Israelites were to observe the Passover which was to be a reminder of how God delivered them out of Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:14-17).

In my life, I have utilized a prayer journal to help me remember God's faithfulness. All of us know how easy it is to forget, so I write things down in my journal. First, I record prayer requests. Second, I write down spiritual lessons God has taught me. Third, I include key verses that have given me strength, encouragement, and direction through various times in my life. Many times I have gone back to my prayer journal and been amazed at how God has worked in my life. For example, one of the greatest challenges my family had to endure was going through a miscarriage. My prayer journal helped me through this time as I reflected upon how God brought me through other challenges in my past. What a faithful God we serve! May the following verses remind you of this unchanging TRUTH!

> Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies (Psalm 36:5).
>
> I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever; to all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth (Psalm 89:1).
>
> The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-23).

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Walk and Be Filled by the Holy Spirit

We live in an age of self-help books. These books come with the promise to give you more confidence, to make you rich, to help you accomplish your goals, and to make you "happy." While I am sure that some of these books have kernels of truth, I am surprised by how many Christians read them for guidance and direction even though most of these books begin from a different starting point than God's Word. Many believers in Christ today walk around like many non-Christians with no confidence, direction, nor meaning in life. This should not be since as Christians we have been given the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised the disciples multiple times that when He left, He would send the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Holy Spirit was to be a Helper, to teach them all things, to bring to remembrance all the things Jesus had taught them, to empower them to proclaim the Gospel, and to lead them into all truth (John 7:39; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-14; Acts 1:8). The fulfillment of this promise occurred on Pentecost when they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). From that moment on, the Holy Spirit took on an active role in the lives of not only the disciples, but the entire believing community (Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 8:29; 10:19-20; 13:1-3; 16:6-10). The Spirit who was active then is the same Spirit who is active today. In fact, just as the Spirit empowered the early Christians in the Book of Acts and guided their lives, we, too, can have the confidence to live our lives with the power and authority of the Holy Spirit.

How do we know if we are walking by the Holy Spirit? Read Galatians 5:16-25 and compare the fruit of a person who walks in the Spirit versus one who walks according to the lust of the flesh.

This is why it is so important we root out any hidden sins in our lives. Sin not only breaks our fellowship with God, it destroys our peace, and pulls us outside of God's will. David clearly understood the devastating effects of sin (Psalm 51). This is why when he was confronted by the prophet Nathan concerning his adultery, he repented of his sin before God. Therefore, just like David, we must examine our lives and make sure we are walking in obedience and not justifying willful sin.

As we talked about earlier, Paul tells us that God's will for us is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7), which means God desires for us to live a life of holiness. How do we live a life of holiness? We need to walk in the Spirit, so we do not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). Living our lives in the center of God's will means we do not pattern our lives after this world. Instead, we strive in every way to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. On our own, we will always fail in doing this. Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit to enable us to live a life that accords with the will of God. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

Meditate Upon God's Word

A woman I knew was going through a very difficult time. She had recently lost her husband of over 35 years. Trying to deal with the grief of losing him, she also found out she would not get his pension. This meant she might have to sell her house. When I went to see her, she was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. As we sat and talked, she told me she had no idea whether she should sell her house, and if she did, should she stay in the area or move down south with her son. I gave her some verses to meditate on which were intended to get her to focus upon the Lord rather than upon her circumstances.

Along with listening to theologically-sound worship music, I have found that meditating upon God's Word has been an effective way to keep my life focused on doing His will and not my own. What do I

mean when I say that we should meditate upon God's Word? Let me first explain what I *do not* mean. It is not emptying your mind and trying to attain an altered state of consciousness. Rather, it is filling your mind with God's Word where you study, reflect, and apply what it says to every area of your life. Just like our body needs physical food to survive, God's Word is spiritual food for our soul. The Bible provides us with proper direction—it tells us why we are here and where we are going; proper doctrine—it tells us what we need to know; proper discernment—it tells us how we can know right from wrong; and proper discipline—it tells us how we are to live.

When I was in college, my soccer coach took the team on a trip. We spent a week living in the mountains sleeping under a tarp. The highlight of the week was when we went exploring in a cave. Inside the cave, it was cold, wet, and very dark. There were places where we could stand, while other places required us to get down and crawl on our knees. We were able to successfully navigate the cave because we had flashlights guiding us through it.

After being in the cave a few hours our coach told us to turn off all the flashlights and find our way out. As we tried to do this, some team members began to bump their heads into the sides of the cave, others began to scream, while some just stood still, afraid they would fall in a hole.

After a few minutes, which seemed like hours, our coach told us to turn on our flashlights. He then told us to point them all in the same direction. As we did this, we quickly came to realize how close we were to the exit of the cave. What was once covered by darkness had now been revealed by our flashlights. This is exactly what the Bible does for our lives. It acts as a light, helping us navigate through life. As the psalmist said, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Following the death of Moses, Joshua was placed in charge by God to lead the children of Israel into the land He had promised them. Consider carefully the words God said to Joshua in order for him to be successful in acquiring this land, and may they be a guide for you as God leads you toward the fulfillment of the plans He has for your life:

> Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:6-9).

Rest in God's Peace—Having an Attitude of Contentment

A final principle to consider in knowing God's will is to rest in His peace. We have already discussed the dangers of living a life of worry and how we can overcome this (Philippians 4:6-7). Added to the avoidance of worry, another way we can rest in God's peace is to have an attitude of contentment. A key thing to remember is that following God's will does not necessarily mean life is going to be easy. In fact, following Jesus usually comes with times when we will face trials, tribulations, and even persecution (Matthew 10:21-23; 2 Timothy 3:12). It is during these times when not only is the authenticity of our faith tested (1 Peter 1:6-7), but also when God can begin to teach us important spiritual truths (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-6).

The story of Joseph is a great reminder of the challenges we face when we live our lives in the center of the Lord's will. After being sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph is promoted as overseer of the house of Potiphar who was an officer of Pharaoh (king of Egypt). While in this position, Joseph not only served Potiphar faithfully, but most importantly, he served God faithfully. This faithfulness was on display as he refused all advances by Potiphar's wife to have sexual

relations with her, "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he [Potiphar] has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

Despite his willingness to obey God and follow His will, we see that Joseph was put into prison, and as we find out in Genesis 40 and 41, he would remain there for over two years. After this time, Joseph is finally placed by God into the position of second highest in the Egyptian empire (Genesis 41:42-45). This was God's will for Joseph as he was able to save his family from the severe famine that was in the land (Genesis 45:3-8). However, as we already saw, before this came to fruition, Joseph faced many challenges and trials along the way.

The Apostle Paul is another example of someone who faced many challenges as he followed God's will for his life. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he talks about how he was beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). As he faced all of this, how did Paul rest in God's peace? One of the things he did was to have an attitude of contentment. In other words, Paul realized he was sufficient (lacking in nothing) to face anything because of Jesus Christ: "Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

As I have learned in my own life, following God's will brings unexpected twists and turns. As they come, many will respond by complaining, questioning God, and doubting. In contrast, others will respond like Paul, with an attitude of contentment, regardless of what circumstances come along. Which way are you going to respond? If you want His peace, remember to keep your focus on Him:

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV).

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5. Bill Rudge, *Fasting for Sensitivity and Power* (Hermitage, PA: Living Truth Publishers, 2023), 107.

Choices

We have just examined ten great principles we can apply as we seek to follow God's will for our lives. Even though they will give us proper direction, we still have to face the reality that in life we will have to make choices.

A friend of mine found himself facing a major decision. He had just completed his third year as head coach of a very successful high school athletic team. As he was moving forward to the next season, he simply did not know if he should return. He also had a desire to coach at the collegiate level and was not sure if now was the best time to make the move. Being confronted with a decision, he felt uncertain as to what choice would be best for him and his family.

I am sure all of us can sympathize with my friend. Whether we have had to make a choice about our jobs, education, or family, choices rarely come with one simple solution. Instead, we often find ourselves caught in the complexity of the "what if's…" and the "how about that's"… scenarios.

List the Choices and Ask Key Questions

To try and bring some straightforward direction in making choices, here is some practical advice that has helped me. First, I write down the choices that are in front of me. For instance, consider my friend who was deciding whether he should coach and if he should coach at the collegiate level. The following were the choices before him: to not coach at all; to coach the same team; or to coach at a college.

Once I have my choices before me, I then begin to list the positives and negatives of each choice. The way I do this is by asking key questions, such as: Is this decision consistent with biblical truth? Does this decision honor the Lord? Does this decision advance the kingdom? Does this decision draw me closer to Jesus Christ? How does this decision affect my relationship with my family? Once I

have laid out my options, asked key questions, and applied the ten principles mentioned earlier, I then make my final decision.

By the way, my friend decided to stay and coach the same team. Not only did he have his most successful season, but God used him to impact the lives of many of his athletes.

Making the Final Decision

After evaluating the choices before us, we are confronted with having to make a final decision. As we do this, it is important to keep the following two things in mind. First, after making our decision, we cannot let others distract and influence us to get off course. Once we have committed our decision to the Lord, just like Noah, we must keep moving forward, regardless of what others might think, say, or do. Second, we cannot second-guess ourselves. Instead, we need to trust the Lord and rest in His peace.

In the context of these two points, I remember the day when I made the decision I was going to marry my wife, Tara. We had met in high school and, during a period of five years, faced all the ups and downs that can come with dating. After spending some time apart, we decided we were going to meet at a local park to discuss our future. She was enrolled in nursing school, and I was making plans to go to seminary. The day we were to meet, I still had no idea what I was going to say to her. In fact, I was still unsure of what future we had together.

As I pulled my car into the parking lot and started to get out, I said one final prayer. Following that prayer, I opened my car door and saw Tara standing by the lake in the park. At the exact moment I looked at her, I said to myself, "There is my future wife." Since then, I have never regretted the decision I made when we were married on June 17, 2000. God has truly blessed my life with a godly and virtuous wife and six wonderful children.

Just as I had done the day I decided I was going to marry Tara, I remembered these words of my father, and they will also be of value to you as you make decisions in your own life: "If you are submitted and yielded to Jesus Christ, walking in obedience to His Word, and desiring to glorify Him, it is impossible for you to miss His will for your life. The Lord will guide, direct, convict, speak to your heart, and open or close doors to fulfill His purpose. So, let me challenge you to saturate your life with Scripture, spend time with Him in

prayer, set apart special times to fast and wait upon the Lord, walk in obedience to His Word and Spirit, and seek to honor Him with every aspect of your life. Then, you will know His will and fulfill His purpose in your life."

The Ultimate Goal Is God's Glory

I mentioned earlier how my wife and I went through the painful ordeal of having a miscarriage. The whole process was truly a roller coaster of emotions. While God had previously blessed our lives with four children, the pain of losing our fifth child with the miscarriage was still very real. I would like to share with you some of my personal thoughts I wrote in my journal as I walked with my family through this trial. I pray that as you move forward with the desire to serve God and live in accordance with His will, you will be encouraged and challenged by this. Regardless of what you are facing, the key point to remember as you seek to live in the center of God's will is that the ultimate aim of any decision you make is His glory.

My wife called me at work to inform me she was pregnant with our fifth child. At first, it took some time to have this information settle in for both of us. So many things were going through our minds: how were we going to have enough room (we only had three bedrooms and we already had three of the kids in one of them); how could we afford another child; how could we have enough time for each child? We were not even planning on having another child. In fact, we had already taken some preliminary steps to dispose of our baby clothes and toys.

However, after the reality set in, we began to realize how much God had blessed our family and how, when we were not planning for our fourth, our lives were so enriched with Hannah. We knew of other people in our lives who could not get pregnant, and we realized what a blessing children are from God. We decided to wait a few days before we told the kids. The day we told them, my son Lucas (4 years old) said he had prayed the night before that God would put a baby boy in his mommy's tummy. Since he lives with three sisters, you can't be too surprised at his request.

The day we told the kids, I can still see their faces and hear their responses. I sat them all down and told them Mommy and I had

some news. I then told them Mommy had a baby in her belly. Their eyes got really big, and I can still hear my son Lucas giggling with excitement. I then talked to them about how we would need their help, especially with Mommy who "gets sick when she is pregnant." After we told the kids, we began to let family and friends know. You should see the response by people when you tell them you are having a fifth child. The most common response I got was this look of shock as the person seemed to not know what to say. As the days went by, the excitement and preparation for our new child grew. There were certainly going to be some sacrifices on the part of all of us, but to see my wife's face glow, the smiles on my children's faces, and the joy of being part of a big family gave me a sense of peace and excitement in knowing that I would be a father again.

Tara was scheduled to get her first ultrasound on May 16, 2012. The day we went to get the ultrasound, I had no inclination there would be a problem. I prayed before we left and expected the same results we had with our previous children. Tara figured she was about 8½ to 9 weeks pregnant which would put her due date around Christmas.

As the doctor started to do the ultrasound, I could tell in her voice that something was not right. I asked her what was wrong and she said she could not hear a heartbeat, which was not normal, especially if Tara was around eight weeks pregnant. The doctor then recommended we go to the hospital to get another ultrasound. While she was certain there was no heartbeat, she still wanted to verify this with a better machine. After she told us this, I walked out of the office and just stood there not knowing what to say or think. I waited for Tara to come out and then we got into the car together and we prayed. We called our parents to let them know and then we headed to the hospital.

As we waited at the hospital to get the second ultrasound, I kept thinking back on how this had been such a happy experience for us with our previous children. Now, we were facing the reality of losing a child. We finally got called to go to the room to get the ultrasound. As the technician did the ultrasound, I could tell from her face that there was no heartbeat. I did not need to ask her, nor did she need

to say anything, which she did not, to know that my worst fear was a reality. At the end of the ultrasound, she said we could leave and the doctor would give us a call later that day.

The time we had to wait for the doctor's phone call seemed to take forever. Finally, the phone rang, and the doctor confirmed that the second ultrasound also did not pick up a heartbeat. Now Tara had to make a decision, did she want to go to the hospital to get a D&C, wait for the pregnancy to terminate naturally, or take some type of pill to help speed things along. At this point, she simply did not know what to do as mentally we were both still trying to deal with the fact that the baby was no longer alive. I remember both of us sitting on the couch with no expression or words to say. I did what I have only done one other time—I cried in front of my wife. I just wished I could make everything better and take away her pain, but there was nothing I could do.

When our two oldest came home from school, we decided to take them, along with our son, for a walk to tell them about the baby. As we were leaving to go on the walk, they kept asking if everything was OK with the baby. We then began to talk to them about how the baby had died and was in heaven. I remember telling them that, while we may not be able to understand why God wanted the baby in heaven, we could have the hope to know one day we would see the baby again. I must admit that for me this was the hardest part, and even though I knew my kids were young and may not fully understand the whole situation, I wanted them to see how, as their father, I sought to walk by faith and trust God through a difficult situation.

After a few days of talking, praying, and discussing it with the doctor, Tara decided to get a D&C. The psychological/emotional stress was beginning to wear her down. Tara contacted the doctor who set up a time for her on Friday to have the procedure done. Before the procedure, Tara wanted to have another ultrasound just to have peace of mind and final closure. This was to be scheduled the Wednesday before the D&C procedure.

Amid all of this, I was scheduled to speak at a men's conference at a church in my area. I was initially going to speak on the importance

of Scripture reading, but I switched my topic to prayer. I could not think of a more pertinent topic to speak on in light of what my family was facing. I had been very distracted all week and waited until Friday to complete my message. I did not get out of work until after 4 p.m. and went home to unwind. When I got home, I just felt uneasy about the message. I prayed about it and felt the Lord was leading me in a new direction. So, even though I was physically exhausted and mentally worn out, I went back to work to change my message. Around 8:30 p.m., I completed it and went home feeling much more at peace.

I really felt the Lord had me change my message as it had a greater connection with the situation I was facing. The concluding point I came to was a verse in Philippians 1. Paul is writing this letter while he is in prison, and he makes the following comment about his situation: "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20 NIV). This verse was a great reminder that our ultimate goal is His glory. In fact, this is what I thought of after someone told me she would be praying about our next ultrasound. This woman asked me how she should pray about this situation. She wanted to know if she should pray that God would give us enough faith to believe that He would restore the life of my child. I pondered this question. I have always believed that God can heal, but would a lack of faith on my part hinder God from intervening?

As I contemplated this question, and came across the verse in Philippians, I came to the following conclusion. First, I should have faith and trust that God can intervene in this situation. Second, even though I desire to hold my child and have the joy of being a father again, my ultimate prayer should be that God is glorified in this situation—perhaps, He would be glorified by intervening and performing a miracle, or perhaps He would be glorified through the faith my wife and I demonstrated during this. We were dealing with non-believers, and our desire was that God would be evident to them in this situation. That is what my prayer was and it was what I told others to pray: that God would be glorified!

We did eventually get the third ultrasound, and, like the previous two, it confirmed there was no heartbeat. As the next few weeks brought with them more challenges, God not only continued to sustain us through this valley in our lives, but He would also bless our lives with another child. Right around the time when our previous child would have been born, my wife found out she was pregnant again. As we waited for our daughter, Samantha, to be born (she arrived in August 2013), I was constantly reminded that the ultimate aim in our lives should be His glory. In fact, this is the heart of living in God's will. It is when we desire His glory above anything else. "Be exalted above the heavens, O God; let Your glory be above all the earth" (Psalm 57:11).

Whom Am I Going To Serve?

I met a young woman at a conference where I spoke who wanted to serve God and follow His will for her life. However, the temptations and struggles of life began to pull her away from following Him. As we sat and talked, I reassured her that, while God does forgive our sins (1 John 1:9), being a follower of Jesus Christ was more than just responding to an altar call and making a one-time confession. Instead, it is a life-time commitment where we make Jesus Christ both the Lord and Savior of our lives. As Jesus Himself said, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:38-39 NIV).

I went on to tell her she was at a critical crossroads in her life where she had to make a choice. She had to decide whether she would continue to follow the way of the world, which tells her to give in to her desires and to pursue a life of self-pleasure, or whether she would follow Jesus Christ and be completely yielded to Him. In essence, she needed to decide whom she was going to serve.

Just like this young woman, we all must decide "Whom are we going to serve?" This is a vital question, because if we truly want to live our lives in the center of God's will, we have to realize this means we no longer live for ourselves, but we live for Him. In other words, our greatest passion in life is to see God's name honored and glorified as we live each day loving Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Matthew 22:37).

I have found in my own life that the more I seek to follow God's will and draw closer to Him, the more I have to sacrifice (Matthew 16:24-26). In fact, following God is sometimes a difficult path, and just like an Olympic athlete training for competition, it requires perseverance. Yet, despite what it may cost, I hold on to the promise that whatever I may lose in this life, I will gain so much more in the next one. That is why no matter what comes my way, I

continue to press forward with the hope of the future God has in store for me (Romans 8:18; 1 Corinthians 2:9) and always being mindful of how much He loves me. "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

As you count the cost that comes with following God's will, ponder the words Joshua said to the children of Israel as they prepared to go into the Promised Land. And just like them, ask yourself the question, "Whom am I going to serve?"

> Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:14-15).

Hearing God's Voice and Knowing His Will

The following chapter is a complementary article written by my father, Bill Rudge, who has directed a multifaceted ministry for over 45 years. He provides helpful insight on hearing God's voice and knowing His will.

Every day, we are faced with decisions. Some we must decide spontaneously, such as: What am I going to eat today? What should I wear? Do I stop for this yellow light or go through it to avoid sliding on wet pavement? Other decisions require more time to consider, such as: Where do I go to college? Which job offer should I accept? What house do I buy? These "life-determining" decisions are ones for which I earnestly depend on the Lord for direction. Getting on my knees or being prostrate before the Lord is an act of humility and dependence, so I can stand in confidence and assurance that I am doing His will and not merely mine.

It is important that we know and do the will of God. Jesus said that only those who do the will of His Father will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). The Apostle John said that those who do the will of God will live forever (1 John 2:17). So, we have a strong motivation for seeking to know and do the will of God.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians that "we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:9-10).

Several years ago, I lectured at a Bible college in California on the topic of hearing God's voice and knowing His will. I shared biblical principles and personal illustrations of God's leading, and the impossible circumstances He has enabled me to overcome throughout the years as I trusted and obeyed Him.

The Bible college professor who sponsored me to speak, as well as the students, knew I was in the middle of an impossible situation at the time. Our ministry building sat unsold, yet I testified that the Lord had not only led me to sell it, but also to step out in faith that very month—without any finances—and begin construction of new facilities. The students and professor were encouraged by my testimony of faith and confidence that the Lord would meet the needs of this endeavor. However, because there was no human way this faith venture could be accomplished without the Lord's miraculous intervention, the professor said he would wait to see how it turned out.

Almost two years later, I spoke at this Bible college again and shared many of the amazing things the Lord did in fulfilling what He had led me to do. The students and professor were greatly encouraged that, in spite of overwhelming obstacles, the Lord was faithful, and the end result was ultimate victory.

Numerous amazing accounts of God's intervention in my life and ministry amidst apparently impossible circumstances are documented throughout my records in my journals *The Impossible* and *Adventures In Missions*. Therefore, in this chapter I will focus on the biblical insights and principles the Lord has taught me to know His will.

Want to Know God's Will for Your Life?

When I was a new Christian, people tried to tell me the Lord's will for my life. As I matured in the Lord, they wanted me to tell them God's will for their lives. I will not have any part of either one. I will share the Word of God and what the Holy Spirit impresses on my heart and agree with them in prayer, but the final responsibility concerning God's direction for someone's life is between God and that individual.

I remember when I was a brand-new Christian, and I went to a man of God whom I greatly respected. I said, "You are so close to the Lord, He speaks to you so much. Would you pray and tell me

what God wants me to do?" I wanted a quick, easy, convenient way to get God's guidance. He said, "Bill, it is your responsibility to seek God's will for your life. You had better learn right now to discipline yourself to get into God's Word and get on your knees to seek God's will and know His voice." Although I was at first disappointed, he taught me a very crucial biblical principle.

This Is Not Sorcery or Coercion

In sorcery, practitioners attempt to manipulate the spirit world to do their bidding. By using the right rituals, formulas, incantations, or spells, the person attempts to change their circumstances and accomplish their purposes. So, too, many Christians attempt to coerce or force God to give them what they want. Others pray over a Bible and then whatever Scripture they happen to open to becomes their guidance. There are times God may speak to our hearts or confirm something through random searching of the Scriptures, but to use it as the ouija board or tarot cards is extremely dangerous.

In contrast, a biblical Christian should submit to the Lord's will through study of Scripture and prayer. God has a plan and purpose for our lives, so our desire should be for Him to fulfill it. Various scriptures assure us that He will:

> …for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).
>
> Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24).
>
> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Seek His Will Not Yours

My prayer and fasting list reminds me of a profound spiritual truth I have learned: "I have no will but to do Your will and no right but to do what is right in Your eyes."

Instead of determining what I want God's will to be, then hoping He blesses my decision, I seek the Lord with all my heart through prayer, fasting, and reading Scripture. Until He gives clear direction, I walk by faith using wisdom as I live by biblical principles.

Our current circumstances—which we may want to change immediately—could have a crucial purpose. What happens in me while I am waiting is sometimes more important than what I am waiting for. The waiting and seeking could be a time of refining and purifying; learning trust and perseverance. Therefore, as I seek His guidance, my prayer is that the Lord's will and timing—not mine—prevails.

When I am certain of what He is leading me to do, I step out in faith and obedience, then persevere until He fulfills what He leads me to do. He has always been faithful—often at the last minute. His timing is always perfect.

Scripture Reveals God's Will

Ephesians 5:17 admonishes, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

God's will is clearly revealed in Scripture. A few examples follow:

- It is His will that all people come to salvation through faith in Christ (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:3-4).
- It is God's will that you love one another (John 13:34).
- It is God's will that you saturate your life with His Word (2 Timothy 2:15).
- It is God's will that you walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).
- It is God's will that you be a witness for Him (Acts 1:8).

- It is God's will that in everything you give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- It is God's will that you are not conformed to this world but transformed into His likeness (Romans 8:29;12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 3:12-14; and 1 John 3:2).
- It is God's will that you be an overcomer (Revelation 3:21).
- It is God's will that you be sanctified—separate from the world; pure (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7).
- It is God's will that you abstain from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18).
- It is God's will that wives be subject to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22).
- It is God's will that husbands love their wives (Ephesians 5:25).
- It is God's will that children obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1).

Before we can expect an answer when we cry out to the Lord for specific direction for our lives, we must be certain we are obeying the clear revelation in His Word.

Be Led By His Spirit

My desire is to be led by His Spirit; to be sensitive to hear, know, and obey His voice.

Some hear God's voice in everything, while others believe God only speaks through Scripture. I am convinced, however, that God speaks to us today by both His Word and His Spirit. When we need advice and guidance for specific decisions, His Spirit will guide those who hear and obey His voice.

Those in the Old Testament were often led by prophets who served as God's spokespersons. Today, believers are led by His Spirit. Never forget that His Spirit will not contradict His Word.

The following are a few biblical accounts of being led by His Spirit:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1).

Jesus told the religious leaders in Jerusalem:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me (John 10:27).

The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his companions to speak the Word in Asia (Acts 16:6), and the Spirit of Jesus would not permit them to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7). How did the Holy Spirit stop them? Perhaps a dream, vision, prophetic utterance, or speaking to their heart? We then read that: "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:9-10).

Clearly, Scripture reveals that God's Spirit guides and directs His people.

Make the Right Decisions

I have received hundreds of requests from pastors and missionaries around the world wanting me to come and speak. They write or call saying, "We need you here to minister at a convention or pastors' conference." It is impossible to accept all of the requests I receive, but when the Lord speaks to my heart to go, I obey.

Every day, I face dozens of decisions that must be made. It is obviously not realistic to seek the Lord intensely for each of these. I use wisdom and strive to live by biblical principles. James 1:5 says: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." So, I continually pray for wisdom when making decisions. It is amazing how in various situations His Spirit brings a biblical passage or principle to mind or speaks to my heart what to do.

There are also many decisions which do not have to be made immediately, and, due to their far-reaching implications, require special consideration. These I put on my prayer and fasting list and keep them there until the Lord gives clear direction. There are also situations where a crucial decision must be made immediately. All I have time for is a brief prayer for guidance and help. I trust the Lord to help me make the right choice. I strive to base my decisions on such questions as: Is it consistent with biblical truth? Does it honor the Lord? Does it advance His Kingdom?

There are some situations so complex that all I can pray is: "Lord, You know the future and what is best. Please give me wisdom of what to do and line up the circumstances as You desire so that Your will prevails and Your name is glorified."

This Is How The Lord Leads Me

So, how does the Lord lead me? First, I make a prayer and fasting list of special concerns and ministry opportunities. Then, I consistently and persistently pray and seek the Lord's guidance concerning where He wants me to go and what He wants me to do. All the while I am saturating my mind and heart with Scripture. I try to have Bible study and prayer three times a day which keeps my heart yielded and receptive to Him. I also have a time of prayer and fasting—usually one day a week—during which I pray through my fasting list. Every January, I have a time of intense prayer and fasting as I seek the Lord's will for the coming year.

Whether immediately or after weeks or months, the Lord speaks to my heart concerning various requests on my prayer list. Then, it becomes crystal clear what He wants me to do.

Countless times while reading Scripture, praying, waiting on the Lord, and meditating on His Word, issues I am dealing with and decisions I must make are resolved. I just know in my heart that this is what I am supposed to do.

Many times, I have sought the Lord concerning a certain decision I need to make and have received no clear direction. During those

times of silence, until He gives me assurance and peace concerning what He is leading me to do, I walk by faith using wisdom as I seek to apply scriptural truth and principles. Just as the Israelites stayed right where they were encamped until the Lord led them to move (Numbers 9:18), usually I stay right where I am until the Lord leads otherwise. This gives me opportunity to pray and ponder the options. However, when He stirs my heart, I am ready to step out and obey.

Circumstances Do Not Deter Me

People have often asked if maybe I should cancel an upcoming mission trip or Holy Land Adventure because of the potential dangers. I responded, "When the Lord leads me to do something, circumstances do not determine whether I change it or not. If circumstances determined my course, my ministry would have ended in its first year."

As has been proven countless times on all my mission trips and in other faith ventures, God fulfilled what He led me to do. He did some awesome things because I sought His will—not mine—and obeyed it. He has honored, blessed, and protected in incredible ways because I have sought Him and His will with all my heart and desired to honor and glorify Him with every aspect of my life.

Once God leads me to do something, nothing and no one can stop me. I will persevere until it is accomplished. He has instilled within me the determination never to give up until what He has led me to do is completed.

Despite frequent and overwhelming obstacles that usually rise up after I step out in faith to obey, He somehow makes a way where there is no way. As stated previously, He has always been faithful to fulfill what He has led me to do, and the end result has always been ultimate victory.

Twelve Most Important Principles

A summary of the principles I adhere to, while seeking His will, follow. They have been shared with many pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and Christian leaders, and are relevant for all believers:

1. Saturate my heart and mind with His Word and prayer.
2. Have a time of fasting.
3. Seek His will, not mine—I do not try to coerce or force Him to do what I want, but submit by being willing to do His will.
4. Unless a decision must be made immediately, I wait upon the Lord to give clear direction by speaking to my heart or confirming it in some other way, before stepping out on a faith venture.
5. Until He gives clear direction, I live by the principles in His Word and pray for wisdom.
6. All decisions and guidance must be consistent with Scripture and truly glorify Him.
7. Once I am certain of what He is leading me to do and I have His peace, I step out in faith and obedience. I share with others what He has led me to do and testify in advance that He will bring it about in His time and way.
8. Attempt to maintain an attitude of faith and trust no matter what my circumstances. I continue to trust and honor Him, even when it seems hopeless, by strengthening myself in the Lord with His past faithfulness.
9. I will not compromise my convictions to help my God-given goal to be fulfilled.
10. I do not let circumstances deter me.
11. Until what He has led me to do is fulfilled and His purpose is accomplished, I never give up but persevere in faith.
12. Upon achieving ultimate victory, I testify of His faithfulness and record the final outcome in *The Impossible* or

Adventures in Missions.

Do Not Miss His Will

Proverbs 16:9 says, "The mind [heart] of a person plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps."

When I am praying about something, I tell people, "If it is not God's will, I do not want it. And if it is His will and I am being obedient, then nothing can stop me from achieving it. I have no will, but to do His will. I can rest in Him and be at peace."

Let me repeat an encouraging word for you: If you are submitted and yielded to Jesus Christ, walking in obedience to His Word, and desiring to glorify Him, it is impossible for you to miss His will for your life. The Lord will guide, direct, convict, speak to your heart, and open or close doors to fulfill His purpose.

In closing, let me challenge you to saturate your life with Scripture, spend time with Him in prayer, set apart special times to fast and wait upon the Lord, walk in obedience to His Word and Spirit, and seek to honor Him with every aspect of your life. Then, you will know His will and fulfill His purpose in your life.

For More Information

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